

**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
Office of the Spokesman**

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**INTERVIEW**

**Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice  
With Charles Gibson of ABC News**

**August 12, 2008  
Washington, D.C.**

**QUESTION:** Madame Secretary, are we confident that hostilities have now ceased?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, the reporting on the ground is, frankly, mixed. But we are confident that the Georgians have agreed to a ceasefire and that the Russians told the French that they were prepared for a ceasefire. And so now, military operations need to stop and the Russians need to stop the military operations that they've been engaged in and reverse this situation.

**QUESTION:** Well, the Russian President Medvedev said we want a ceasefire. The Georgians insist that shelling and bombing is still going on. We just don't know.

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, as I said, the reporting on the ground -- as you might imagine, Charlie, in, essentially, a war zone, the reporting can be somewhat mixed. But the Russians have told the French that they are going to engage in a ceasefire. They need to call -- they need now to follow through on that promise. I assume we will soon know, but it is up to Russia to stop its military operations.

**QUESTION:** You said -- in your statement there on the North Lawn, you said the United States stands for the territorial integrity of Georgia. Does that include or exclude South Ossetia and Abkhazia?

**SECRETARY RICE:** South Ossetia and Abkhazia are within the internationally recognized boundaries of Georgia. They are zones of conflict. There have been a number of peace efforts including, most recently, ones by the German Foreign Minister to find a solution to the conflict, but they are inside the international boundaries of Georgia. And any conclusion, any agreement is going to have to recognize Georgia's territorial integrity.

**QUESTION:** So if Russian troops were to remain in South Ossetia and in Abkhazia, we would consider that a violation of the territorial integrity of Georgia?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, it's important to be precise here. There were Russian peacekeepers as well as Georgia peacekeepers in the zone of conflict under an Organization of Security and

Cooperation in Europe agreement prior to the events of August 6. And so forces that arrived after August 6 need to move back to their pre-August 6th positions. We can then determine what can be done to keep the peace in South Ossetia and Abkhazia as a part of an international agreement. But the territorial integrity of Georgia must be preserved.

**QUESTION:** And the territorial integrity of Georgia would include, again, South Ossetia and Abkhazia?

**SECRETARY RICE:** They are both within Georgia's internationally recognized boundaries, absolutely.

**QUESTION:** So if -- to put the question another way, then, if those Georgian peacekeepers were not allowed to return by the Russian troops that are there, we would consider that a violation of Georgian territorial integrity?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Look, I think -- I think it's important that there is an international mediation going on to find modalities for moving forward. But I want to make clear a couple of very important principles. Territorial integrity of Georgia has to be preserved, the democratically elected Government of Georgia has to be respected, Abkhazia and South Ossetia are within Georgia's internationally recognized boundaries, and any resolution of this conflict has got to recognize those principles.

**QUESTION:** We have warned the Russians that their military actions would have consequences. But a lot people have said, what consequences, what can we essentially do to them?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, Charlie, this isn't 1968. The predecessor state of Russia, the Soviet Union, didn't care about its international reputation because it wasn't attempting to integrate into international organizations; it wasn't attempting to be a part of the prosperous and forward-looking Europe.

The Russians have said that they do want to be a part of that prosperous and forward-looking international community. And frankly, they're doing great damage to their ability to do that. And so there are any number of opportunities for Russia to reverse course and to demonstrate that it is trying to behave according to 21st century principles when you don't intimidate your neighbors, when you don't invade your neighbors. There's an opportunity for them to demonstrate that. But I can assure you that Russia's international reputation and what role Russia can play in the international community is very much at stake here.

**QUESTION:** There is an annual meeting and a group of industrialized nations, generally referred to as the G-8. I was interested to hear you refer to the G-7 that have been talking to the Russians and trying to get them to cease hostilities. Is there some consideration of simply excluding them and taking the G-8 back to the G-7, in effect, kicking them out of the group of large, industrialized nations?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, look, it's just a fact right now that Russia is a party to the conflict. And so the states that have a chance to help resolve this conflict are the G-7 states because Russia is a party to the conflict. We're going to take this one step at a time.

But I want to be very clear that Russia's behavior goes back to another time. But Russia is a different state that has different aspirations and those aspirations for integration into the international community, for continued respect and viability in a lot of these international institutions, that's very much at stake, and I hope Russia will stop and take a long look at what it's been doing.

**QUESTION:** When you say that's very much at stake, is there some consideration on the part of the large, industrialized nations to exclude Russia from that group?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Charlie, we're concentrating right now on getting this conflict stopped, so that people can stop dying, on getting the Russians to stop their bombardment of Georgian infrastructure and even Georgian ports and towns like Gori. We are concentrating on the humanitarian assistance that Georgia will need. We're concentrating on getting an assessment of what Georgia will need, in terms of reconstruction, and in sending very strong signals of support to the democratically elected Government of Georgia and its people.

The time will come to deal with the consequences of what has happened, but for now, I hope that the Russians are going to be true to the word that they spoke to the French president and indeed the presidency of EU, which is that they're going to stop these military operations which were disproportionate to the circumstances in which they found themselves, and reverse course.

**QUESTION:** So many people have wondered what the Russian endgame here was, what they intended -- whether it was simply to assert themselves again as a strong regional power, whether it was to keep Georgia and Ukraine out of NATO, whether it was to unseat or depose President Saakashvili, or whether it simply was to take over Georgia again. What's your sense?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, I don't want to try to judge Russian motives. I can tell you what Russian actions showed. It demonstrated that what was clearly -- and we acknowledge is a zone of conflict and it's a zone where there have been flare-ups, and the Russians initially said they were responding to dangers to their peacekeepers. But if that was the case, they had no reason to go well beyond that and to bomb Georgian infrastructure, to call into question the viability of the Georgian port of Poti. They had no reason to bomb targets in Gori, and they certainly had no reason to call into question the viability of the democratically elected Government of Georgia.

So it appears that their aims and their aspirations were greater than to simply deal with the situation inside South Ossetia. Saying that, then, they cannot be allowed to do so, and I think that perhaps one of the reasons that the French mediation is finding some traction is that the Russians met great resistance on moves outside of the zone of conflict and they met greater resistance to the notion that somehow they would have a say about the democratically elected

government of Georgia. We are not in 1968 and the message has been very clear to Russia that it cannot operate that way.

**QUESTION:** And just one other question. The Georgian President Saakashvili has used the words “ethnic cleansing” that went on. That’s a very strong term. Do we have evidence of that?

**SECRETARY RICE:** It is a very strong term and I think for now it would be best to -- not to get out ahead of what we know has happened. The United States is going to take every report, of course, very seriously. But what is very clear is that this military operation of Russia needs to stop. We’ve been very supportive of the EU through the French presidency mediation that is going on. I myself was on the phone with Foreign Minister Kouchner earlier in the day. We are going to support that mediation. We are very hopeful that the Russians will do what they’ve said they are going to do -- stop their military operations, engage with a ceasefire, engage the Georgian Government in negotiations and discussions -- and let’s get the underlying conflict in Abkhazia and South Ossetia solved on the basis of the territorial integrity of Georgia.

**QUESTION:** Madame Secretary, thank you very much. You’re kind with your time.

**SECRETARY RICE:** Thank you very much.

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